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A SPUD-TACULAR NEW FALL FESTIVAL ON LI The celebration of the potato offers food, music, history and fun

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A new Long Island event is taking root this fall. The first Long Island Potato Festival will bring carnival rides, live music, local food and a farmers market to Farmingdale State College on Friday and Saturday.

The two-day event will take place on the president's lawn across from Horton Hall from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission and general parking are free.

"My goal is to make this a new annual tradition that brings people together," says Alissa Marti, of Connoisseur Media Long Island, one of the festival's producers. "And to bring back the nostalgia for people who remember the potato farms and educate those who don't."

Fans of spuds can head to the food court, which will sell knishes; loaded, mashed, baked and fried potatoes; and more potato-inspired food, and feature a beer garden. Highlights from Long Island vendors include twisted potato chips on a stick from The Yum Spot in Bohemia, potato empanadas from Island Empanada and loaded meat fries from local food truck Off The Bone.

"Long Island has such a rich farming history, especially when it comes to potatoes and local agriculture, so we thought it would be fun to bring our own style of potato dish to the celebration," says Maria Prince, owner of The Yum Spot. "The spiral potato concept has been popular in parts of Asia and other places for years, but it's still not something you see very often here. What makes our version different is that we don't batter the potato. For us, it's about taking something as simple and familiar as a potato and making it fun, extra crispy and full of flavor, while still letting the potato itself be the star."

Beyond food, the weekend will feature a carnival by Newton Shows, live bands performing both days, local shopping booths, a tots area with touch-a-truck and touch-a-tractor activities for younger kids, a photo booth and agricultural exhibits from Cornell Cooperative Extension of Suffolk County, Marti says.

Smaller potato-themed events have popped up on Long Island before, though organizers say not to this scale.

"I've always thought, why do we not have a potato festival?" says Marti, who is also the strategic partnerships manager for Connoisseur Media. Marti grew up on Long Island at a time when potato farms were still remembered across the region, and she has worked on other Long Island fairs and festivals. The idea for this one has been two years in the making, she says, driven by a simple question: What's true to Long Island, sets the region apart and can still be fun and entertaining?

Potatoes were once more than a crop on Long Island. "It was an industry. It was an identity," Marti says. The region had roughly 75,000 acres of potato farmland before development began eating into that total in the 1980s,

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shrinking it to about 20,000 acres, according to Marti. Some of that land became familiar Long Island names, Marti says: Grumman rose in Bethpage from what was once Looney's potato farm, Est\xE9e Lauder purchased 60 acres of potato fields to build its corporate offices in Melville and Martha Clara Vineyards in Riverhead also traces its roots to old potato land.

That history continues at Hoshyla Farms, a lavender farm in Manorville that was once a potato farm itself, she adds. The fifth-generation, family-run operation will lead the festival's farmers market alongside the Long Island Farm Bureau. "It's one of those events and ways we can help bring that nostalgia back and reconnect with it and understand what we did as a region," Marti says.

For Marti, the farmers market is the festival's centerpiece. "Have some food, eat, listen to live music, ride some rides, and walk out with fresh, local produce. That's unique to Long Island."Long Island Potato Festival

WHEN 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday-Sunday (festival officials are monitoring the weather forecast; check the website for updates)

WHERE 2350 Broadhollow Rd., Farmingdale

ADMISSION Free, with option for paid VIP parking and free handicap-accessible parking

MORE INFO

longislandpotatofestival.com, 631-770-4361

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